

CELEBRATION HONORS PIONEER FIELD BOTANIST ANDRÉ MICHAUX

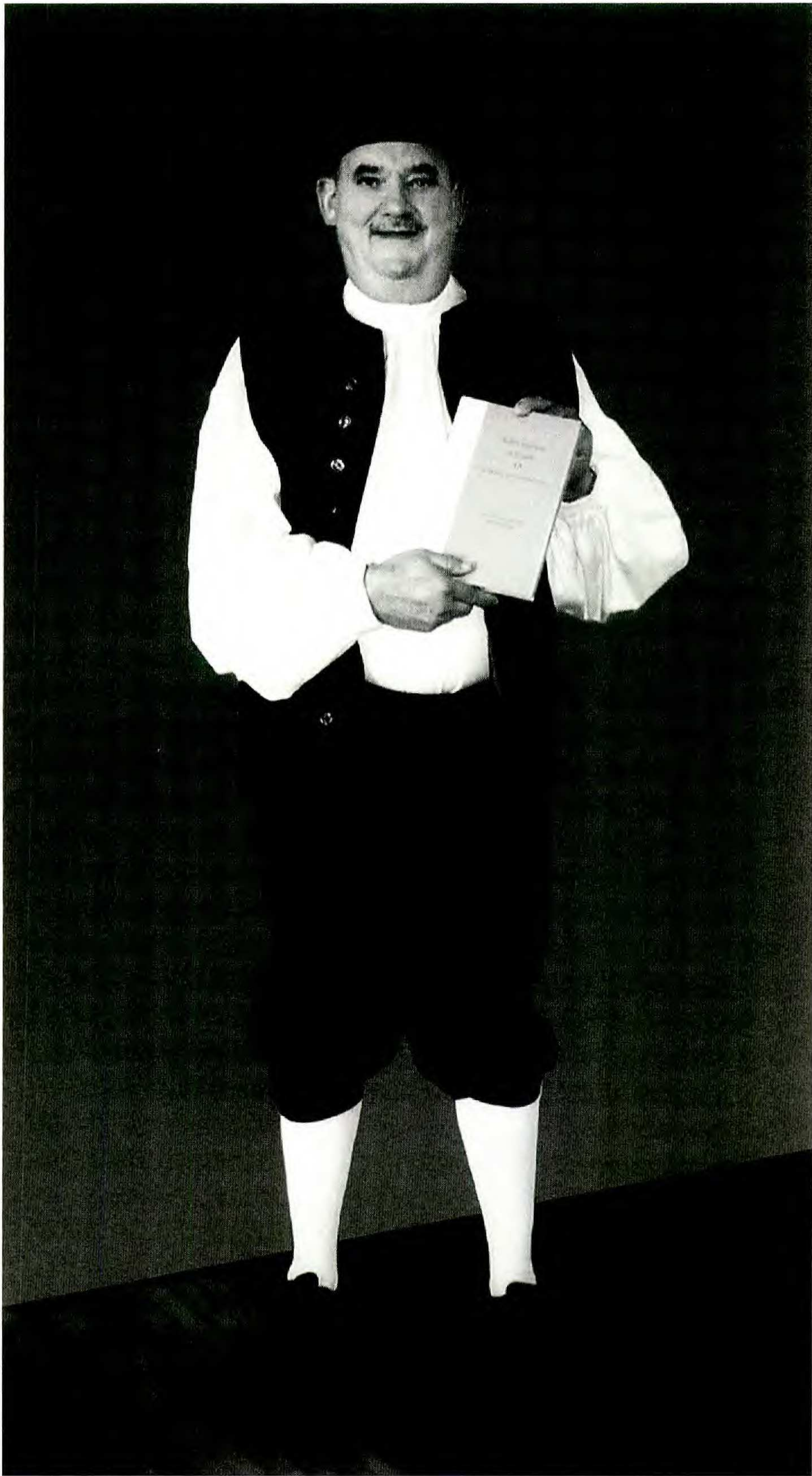
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André Michaux, noted 18th century North American plant explorer extraordinaire, died on the island of Madagascar two hundred years ago. On the occasion of the bicentennial of his death, Michaux's life and contributions to North American botany were highlighted and elucidated at "A Michaux Celebration," attracting nearly 4,000 people. The events began with the André Michaux International Symposium (AMIS), held May 15-17, 2002 in Gaston County, North Carolina. The subsequent two days—called "Celebrate France! Festival Foire!"—occurred at the Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, a relatively young garden with strong public programs. AMIS constituted the official symposium for the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society (SABS), held for the first time separately from the Association of Southeastern Biologists' annual meeting. Belmont Abbey College (BAC), the Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden (DSBG), and Gaston Day School (GDS) were the hosts of the celebration, three years in the planning. Librarian Charlie Williams was the key architect and organizer of the Celebration, whereas Jeanne Miller was the coordinator. Michael J. Baranski (SABS) served as Program Chair for AMIS. Others were Carol Brooks, Dean de la Motte & Robert Tompkins (BAC); Mike Bush (DSBG); Martha Mayberry (Mint Museum of Charlotte); Richard Rankin (GDS); and Jean-Pierre Riviere (French-American Chamber of Commerce, NC).

Setting the tone for the first day were two field trips, enticing and piquing attendees' curiosities and expectations of Michauxiana to come. That evening ethnobotanist Mark Plotkin delivered the opening address at the Gaston Day School. We learned about the importance of natural products from tropical Brazil and Surinam, such as a potential painkiller from the poison dart frog. He emphasized the need for a holistic approach to conserving tropical flora and fauna. Just as pioneer Michaux persevered under the rigors of exploration, conservation efforts require persistent leadership under equally challenging circumstances.

The fast-paced sequence of 28 fact-packed presentations of May 16 and 17, enlightened our knowledge of Michaux. James L. Reveal, historian of botany, delivered the plenary talk, "No Man is an Island: The Lives and Times of André Michaux." After placing into perspective the accomplishments of naturalists prior to Michaux's arrival in the United States, he discussed Michaux's contri-



Walter K. Taylor as André Michaux at AMIS, 16 May 2002, Belmont Abbey College, Belmont, North Carolina. (Photograph by Ronald L. Stuckey, Columbus, Ohio)

butions to field botany. Subsequent paper presentations were of two types: invited (9) and contributed (19). Two other scheduled papers on “The Lowcountry Connection of André Michaux” and “Nature and History of the Botanical Materials of André Michaux in the Herbarium of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia” were not presented.

Each presentation was virtually unique in topic, overlapping little with others. Among the varied themes on Michaux and his activities, were: his connection with the Bartrams of Philadelphia; his Canadian journey; several accounts on plants—named as new to science by him—including *Magnolia macrophylla*; the rediscovery of the site of his botanical garden in Charleston, South Carolina by archaeologists from the College of Charleston; his involvement with the intriguing Edmund Charles Genet Affair in American history; and his excursion to Madagascar where he died on October 11, 1802 (confirmed by a newly discovered death certificate from Mauritius). When speaker/author Walter K. Taylor gave his talk on Michaux in Spanish East Florida during 1788, he appeared in a period costume, eliciting surprise and delight from the audience. In closing the symposium, Françoise Winieska, noted photographer of gardens and plants representing France at the program, gave a slide presentation, “18th century French Gardens in the Domains of Versailles and Rambouillet,” sharing her striking photographs with the captivated viewers.

Additional field trips were held during the symposium and at its conclusion. We enjoyed two dinners at the Stowe Botanical Garden, the evening of May 16 being a “French Gala” of cuisine, eighteenth century period music and dance. On the last evening of AMIS a special treat was an exhibit of engravings and watercolors by eighteenth century botanical artist Pierre-Joseph Redouté at the Mint Museum in Charlotte. Opening in March 2002, the exhibit was specially developed as an adjunct to the Michaux symposium and included five associated talks, among them, “Botanical Illustration: Redouté and the Michaux,” by librarian/historian Ian McPhail. The exhibit will close this year on Bastille Day, July 14.

During breaks and other free periods of time, attendees were lured by exhibits, such as the book displays by the Missouri Botanical Garden and by symposium speakers and other participants. Among the latter were books and audio-cassettes by C. Ritchie Bell; Gail Fishman; Walter K. Taylor and Eliane M. Norman; and Charlie Williams. Locally produced and limited in distribution, the booklet “Memoirs of the Life and Botanical Travels of André Michaux,” by J.P.F. Deleuze is of special note to librarians and historians. Conceived and edited by Charlie and commemoratively published for the symposium, it contains four appendices, among them a supplementary bibliography by Ronald Gilmour. Charlie’s role as editor is a misnomer of the extent of his contribution, as he is also the writer of two of the appendices. The Catawba Lands Conservancy prepared the useful color map folded in the back of the text. The map traces nine journeys that Michaux made in North America from 1787 to 1796.

The publication is available only from Charlie Williams, 6720 Wheeler Drive, Charlotte, NC 28211. Checks are to be written for \$16.50 (which includes postage/handling) to "Belmont Abbey College." Artist and school administrator Erin Whitener had a popular display of her line of note cards, featuring color illustrations of plants discovered by Michaux, which sold out early in the program. Her design of the *Magnolia macrophylla*, leaf or fruit, appeared on symposium stationery, handouts, and tote bags given to attendees.

Two AMIS booklets in our orientation bags may be of interest to others, particularly librarians. These were an "Attendee Roster" containing names, titles, addresses, phone, fax, and email addresses of all attendees; and "Abstracts," providing succinct summaries of each presentation. Fortunately, the proceedings of AMIS are planned to be published in *Castanea* and its *Occasional papers*.

The French Festival featured special talks, French cuisine, and vendors of merchandise such as artwork, jewelry, and Limoge porcelain. This Festival was open to the public and included activities for children such as face painting, games, and guignol (a Punch and Judy show). Sponsored by the French-American Chamber of Commerce (NC), this event took place at the Stowe Garden on May 18 and 19.

The Michaux Symposium is a model for future theme-type conferences. Both the Symposium and the highly popular "Celebrate France!" were resounding successes. The fervor of symposium goers was evident as noted by conversations sparked by the presentations and scholarly interests of those in attendance. Special thanks are extended to the organizers, hosts, and myriad behind-the-scenes people for bringing together such a distinguished assemblage of Michaux scholars and providing a wide array of events.

Historians of botany will have access to a collection of information sheets and brochures available at the conference that have been assembled by The Ohio State University botanist Ronald L. Stuckey. He has deposited the compilation in the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, Pittsburgh. This contribution also includes all of the photographs he took of the invited speakers participating in AMIS.

The symposium will be a lasting contribution to the history of botany, bringing visibility and recognition to the great botanical pioneer André Michaux. "Celebrate France!" accentuated the important French contribution to American culture. "Celebrate Michaux" merged science and culture to make for a fascinating five days of learning and entertainment. Vive Michaux! The influence of Michaux also was recently recognized by the NC Department of Highways, which landscaped an intersection of Interstate 85 in Gastonia with plants first discovered by Michaux. The plot is identified with a permanent marker.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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